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The Conquest of Blindness

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By SIR ARTHUR PEARSON, Bart., G.B.E.

**Victory over Blindness: How it was
Won by the Men of St. Dunstan's and
how others may Win it. [Illustrated.]**

An old St. Dunstanner writes: "I have had your book read through to me from beginning to end, and everything in it is absolutely true to life; in fact, to anyone who has never been inside St. Dunstan's, 'Victory over Blindness' must read like fiction, and the readers could hardly be blamed for thinking that St. Dunstan's, as described in the book, is not a reality, but just a little bit of keen imagination on the part of some novelist, and nothing more. Thank Heaven that it is a reality."

THE CONQUEST OF BLINDNESS

BY
SIR ARTHUR PEARSON, Bt., G.B.E.

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Foreword

EVERY year hundreds of children are born who are never destined to know the blessing of sight; others in youth or in the prime of life are overtaken by blindness from constitutional causes or as the result of an accident. And in old age the fading eyesight often ends in total inability to see. It is my hope that all may find help and encouragement from this book, though it is to those who are stricken with blindness in the midst of the active years of their life that it is mainly addressed. Much that is written here was included in my book, *Victory over Blindness*, a record of the work at St. Dunstan's, and there is no blinded person who may not find amazing inspiration and encouragement in the example of our soldiers blinded in the Great War, and in the fact that practically all of them set to work to overcome their handicap and succeeded. They are now leading happy and useful lives, earning a living by their own exertions, entering into all kinds of recreations, enjoying what is as nearly as possible a normal existence, and finding in the conquest of their handicap a pleasure which has gone far to make up to them for their terrible loss.

I hope that the following pages, based upon personal experience, may be of real use to all those who are compelled to learn to see without sight.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Arthur Fearn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

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Learning to be Blind



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MOST people consider that there is no personal calamity which is greater than blindness. Be this as it may—and many of us who are blind think our lot a happier one than that meted out to some others—it has to be borne. The thought of what is lost must be put into banishment, and the mind must become centred on all that can be achieved in spite of the loss of sight. Think of blindness not as a barrier between you and your fellows, or the life you have known, but as a handicap, and to the conquest of this handicap devote all your energies. It is astonishing how capable the blind can become, what active lives they may lead, what immeasurable opportunities for pleasure lie before those of them whose good health is maintained.

Blind people, beyond all others, need to be cheerful; for a wide, humorous outlook has power to help where nothing else can, and much is gained towards this end if they have cheerful folk about them.

St. Dunstan's became known as the Home of Happiness.

The main idea that animated me in establishing a Hostel for the blinded soldiers was that the sightless men, after being discharged from hospital, might come into a little world where the things which blind men cannot do were forgotten and where everyone was concerned with what blind men can do.

They would naturally need to be looked after and to be trained, and I was convinced that their future happiness, their success, everything, in short, would depend on the atmosphere with which they were surrounded. At the very moment when it would be most natural for them to be despondent I wanted them to be astonishingly interested. I wanted them to be led to look upon blindness, not as an affliction, but as a handicap; not

merely as a calamity, but as an opportunity. I believed that if they started with that idea, then instead of dwelling with ever-increasing despair on their serious deprivation they would be concerned at once to see how quickly they could reduce the handicap. And so it turned out.

There have been wonderful examples of blind men and women whose accomplishments appeared very marvellous. But the more I came in contact with the world of the blind the more it seemed to me that the dwellers in it were regarded too often as a people apart. There was too much pity for their blindness and not enough sympathy with their human natures. It seemed to me that blind people had in the past been generally treated entirely in the wrong manner. Sweet, kindly folk had talked to them about their affliction and the terrible difficulties that beset them. If you tell a man often enough that he is afflicted he will adopt the mental and physical attitude befitting that soul-destroying word. I determined that at least

in my own dealings with the blind the word pity and the word affliction should not be used.

After all, it can be made very interesting to start a new life. For that is what a blinded man has to do. He has to learn to walk firmly and freely again, feeling his way about at first, he has to learn to read and write, using new methods and appliances, he has to learn to do things with his hands without the direction of the eyes, his first efforts as clumsy as those of a child. And he has to discover afresh his powers of accomplishment and enjoyment.

One thing he cannot do—he cannot see—and the sooner he ceases to repine for those pleasures that depend essentially on sight the better. But other senses begin to develop latent and unsuspected powers. The pleasures which seemed absolutely lost become miraculously reduced in number. Mental vision—the common gift of picturing the unseen—comes more and more into play. Sounds, touches, scents convey to him images

that, coloured by experience and imagination, arise realistically out of the darkness.

And as the blind man finds himself increasingly self-reliant, taking something very like his accustomed place in the world, astonishing himself even more than he astonishes others, to whom he seems something of a miracle, the sense of happiness grows.

Thus the first step is to acquire the will to overcome blindness in every possible way and to approach, as near as may be, to a perfectly normal life. And this cannot be done without determination to leave depression behind and to adopt a cheerful mental outlook. This attitude is easy to talk about but difficult to practise. Nevertheless it is essential both for the effect on the man's own powers and because of its influence on those with whom he comes in contact. It does not matter how self-reliant a blind man may become, he must always be, in some measure, dependent on others. For the blind man there is unlimited sympathy—wherever he goes he finds a sense of extra considera-

tion. But in all companionship he feels the need also of extra brightness. He requires the stimulus of that; and it must be remembered how the odd moments which others occupy in some trivial way can by the blind man be spent only in reflection. Thus, unless he is of a naturally solitary disposition, he comes to depend a great deal on others to help pass the time—and the willingness to afford this attention, the spirit in which it is given, must in the end be influenced by what is offered in return. “I am merry,” said Cowper, “in order that I may decoy people into my company,” and it is no bad line to remember.

But the blinded person, having determined to get the greatest amount of pleasure and success out of life, has to begin to face certain obvious difficulties.

Sight is usually called the most precious of the senses. That it is, and more. It is the ruler of the senses; and so strictly does it dominate over them that hearing, smell, and touch are but little called upon while

sight exists. Only so, however, when civilisation has helped to suppress the usefulness of the other servants of the brain. The savage hears, smells and feels his way through the trackless forests in the dark and helps himself to find his route by the exercise of the senses of direction and obstacle which have long ago been forgotten by the man who lives in settled lands. Forgotten though they may be, they are possessed by every human being. To some who lose their sight they come slowly, to some quickly, to a few scarcely at all. The sense of obstacle gives warning when a solid object is approached. On a soft surface which yields no echo to the footfall the solid object is, as a rule, unnoticed if it be not at least breast high. If the surface walked upon yields an echo, the solid object will be discernible even if it be no higher than the knee. The impression of obstacles obtained when on a soft unechoing surface is derived from a combination of causes. Some degree of echo is often one of these, alteration of atmospheric pressure is

another, and change of temperature, caused by a cooler or a warmer surface, may be yet another.

The thinner the object, the more difficult it is to discern it. A lamp-post out of doors, and the edge of a door indoors, are typically difficult objects to sense. It is only practice that makes perfect. And courage in the matter of taking one's knocks is also a point of much importance. The new faculties that enable a blinded man to avoid obstacles do not come immediately; they are a matter of growth more or less rapid, according to the temperament of the individual.

"We depend," says a very competent blind friend of mine, "on the extraordinary sensitiveness of the nerves of the face." The natural sensitiveness of these nerves can easily be demonstrated by holding an object a few inches in front of the face of a totally blind person without previously warning him. He instantly becomes aware of its presence, though there may be absolutely no sound. By the exercise and cultivation

of this sense, a man can walk parallel to a wall or fence at a distance of several feet, becoming at once aware of the fact if he for a moment lessens or increases the distance between himself and it. At first this requires a good deal of concentrated attention, but very soon it becomes a matter of second nature, and requires practically no attention at all. In this way, stationary objects can easily be sensed and avoided when hearing would be quite useless. By degrees the newly-blinded man finds his other senses taking the place of sight in a hundred ways; we who cannot see in the ordinarily accepted meaning of the word still see in our own fashion with those portions of our brains which respond to impulses given by the other senses.

One day at St. Dunstan's I heard a newcomer speak rather grumpily to someone who had asked him whether he wanted to *see* So-and-so. He said, "You don't suppose I should be here if I could see, do you?"

Now this, as I told him, was quite the wrong point of view. When I first lost my

sight I was always very careful to speak of *meeting* people and of having things read to me. But as the true meaning of the verb “to see” impressed itself upon me, I once more got into the way of talking about *reading* my letters and *seeing* my friends.

For a blind man to twist phrases unnecessarily is to emphasise a difference between himself and others and to suggest a susceptibility which should not really exist. Blind people do not want to be spoken to in guarded phrases, but simply and naturally, and people are much more at their ease if they can talk of “seeing” a person or “reading” an item of news in the paper.

Besides, as touch, hearing, and the sense of smell become more and more effective they habitually create mental pictures. It is one thing for a blind man to be able to pick out the tie he wishes to wear by touch, to recognise a bird by its song, or to distinguish a flower by its scent—it is another to see in the mind’s eye the very blossom, to perceive the bird in its varied plumage, to

think instinctively of the tie as a thing of definite shape and colour.

To visualise a room in which you are sitting, or a scene through which you are passing, is to increase your enjoyment and often to make more easy your movements. Moreover, if you picture to yourself one to whom you are talking you instinctively turn towards him in a way that is natural, and not to do this is to suggest singularity and often to create an awkward feeling. Little things count a great deal when a blind man wishes to take his place as naturally as possible with others—as, for instance, the poise of the head when eating, a poise which becomes instinctive, if the table and the plate are mentally seen.

To feed oneself without the aid of vision in a manner that is neither awkward nor ugly is merely a question of touch. It is true that the ends of knives and forks are not as sensitive as are the ends of one's fingers, but practice soon gives the necessary degree of delicacy, and the newly-blinded man quickly

finds himself recognising the difference between various eatables and conveying them to the mouth in a quite ordinary manner.

As a rule, people who do not see are far too apt to allow their food to drift to the edges of their plates, or often deliberately to direct it there, believing that the raised edge will help them. To do this is very apt to lead to the depositing of food on the tablecloth, with dire results from the point of view of the housewife, especially if the food is moist or greasy. I always take particular care to keep my food as much as possible away from the edges of my plate, and continually collect it in the middle by gentle movements of knife, fork or spoon. I think it far easier to load one's fork up with the help of a knife from the middle of the plate than it is to try to do so with the help of the raised edge. Some blind people get into a very bad habit of continuously tapping on their plates with their knife, fork, or spoon to find whether there is anything left uneaten on them. It is just as easy to make this discovery by

passing the implement over the surface of the plate. One blind man whom I know is really a positive nuisance at meals, owing to the incessant tap-tapping of the blade of his knife or the edge of his spoon on the plate. Another useful little table tip is always to pass your knife under your fork when you have cut off a piece of meat or anything else which wants cutting, and are about to convey it to your mouth. One is apt to do the cutting incompletely, with the result that the fork not only lifts the piece one wishes to eat, but trails another larger or smaller piece behind it. One very soon gets into the habit of automatically and quite unostentatiously passing one's knife under one's loaded fork as one lifts it from the plate, and if a blind person will adopt this plan I think he will find a good many awkward situations avoided.

Yet another table tip. A blind person should be careful, after having taken a drink, not to put his glass upon the blade of a knife which is waiting for the next course. One is quite apt to do this, and a very likely

result is that as you pick up your knife over goes the glass. Particularly may this happen with a long-stemmed wine-glass. I once had the mortification of upsetting a glass of wine over the lap of a lady who was seated next to me. It was bad for her dress but good for me, for I do not think I have ever put a glass down on a knife-blade since.

I think that blind people when they meet strangers should form a definite picture of them. From the grasp of the hand, the sound of the voice, the tenor even of the conversation, an image can be formed—just as the hero or heroine of a book becomes real to the imaginative reader—so much so that very often an illustration proves an actual annoyance if it happens that the artist has drawn quite a different picture from the one the reader has formed.

The blind man's conception of a stranger may be incorrect, but it is better than having none at all. It may have to be modified by subsequent descriptions—the hair may be dark instead of fair, the eyes black instead

of blue, the face ruddy instead of pale, and yet not uncommonly blind men keep always to their first impressions, and where it comes to the expression of a face and to character, it would be interesting to know whether the mental pictures do not often catch something that might escape ordinary observers—just as a great portrait-painter emphasises a certain expression, the very soul of a man or a woman, producing a true likeness that may be considered unfaithful by nine critics out of ten who behold it.

To dress himself, to shave and perform other toilet operations, becomes perfectly simple to the blind man who takes pains to get himself back into normal ways. I have frequently been congratulated upon the skill with which my valet ties my bow tie. But I have to take the compliment to myself. My valet neither ties my tie nor does anything else for me, the very simple reason being that I have no valet. When I found my sight was doomed I arrived at various decisions of greater and lesser importance, and

one of the lesser ones was that I had better dispense with the services of the personal attendant who had looked after me for many years, as otherwise he would probably become a stumbling-block in the path of blind proficiency. The great secret of success in learning to be blind is to insist upon doing everything possible for oneself.

I often said to the blinded soldiers, "Blind people will never do anything to help themselves unless they try. Attempt everything that it is in the least possible for you to do. You will, of course, have your difficulties to overcome, and you may have to own to a failure here and there, but on the whole I know you will find, as I have found, that loss of sight is to a surprisingly small degree a bar in the matter of conducting oneself in ordinary life just as people who can see conduct themselves."

One of the first things that a newly-blinded man has to learn is to find his way about indoors.

The natural tendency to advance gropingly

with outstretched hands is quickly overcome in most cases, especially as the sense of obstacle develops. And this is true also of the inclination to shuffle. I believe in using the sole of one's boot to help in discovering where one is when necessity arises, but the habit of always shuffling the foot along the floor is a bad one, easy to get into, difficult to get out of. It gives to the walker an air of hesitation and of indecision and, generally speaking, tends to do away with the freedom of movement which I always regard as a possession of the greatest importance to a blind man. For the same reason the use of a stick indoors is to be discouraged.

“Hasten slowly” is one of the world's well-worn maxims; it is particularly to be laid to heart by people who have lost their sight. I do not believe in dawdling or loafing, but I do hold that those who cannot see as well as others should begin by doing things, particularly moving about, slowly and deliberately. It may take a good many hard knocks to convince one of this, but

once the lesson has been learned one gains confidence, and with confidence comes a normal degree of speed combined with safety.

It is very important that in a house frequented by a blind person the furniture should always occupy the same position, and that everything should be tidy. To leave about small objects such as stools, or to move chairs from one place to another, is bound to be the cause of trouble. Nothing is more apt to destroy growing confidence in moving about than suddenly to find some regular landmark missing or to collide with a piece of furniture which is not in the position it usually occupies. In the same way, it is aggravating to find that things on one's dressing-table have been "tidied" so that you can no longer put your hand on anything you may want.

In going up or down stairs no assistance is needed beyond that given by the banister, which is nearly always so constructed that the shape gives all the indication needed with regard to where the steps begin and end. In developing independence there must always

be care to avoid such reckless habits as going downstairs with both hands in the pockets. One never can be perfectly certain that there is not some pitfall in the way, a loose stair-rod, for instance. A fall downstairs is bad enough even when the hands are free.

Blind people find that they are often warned of things that do not matter in the least, while they are left totally unwarned of things that do matter a great deal. I remember very well an instance of this which happened soon after my sight finally went. I was dining at a house where the drawing-room was on the first floor and the dining-room on the ground floor. I took my hostess down to dinner, and as we approached the drawing-room door she said, "Now be very careful, we are just coming to a mat." The mat in question was a very thin one which really would have required a lot of finding. She then led me straight off the top of the stairs without a word of warning, and had I not been following my usual practice of holding my shoulders well back when I am not sure of my position in regard

to steps, we should certainly both have gone downstairs with more speed than dignity. Blind people should always hold themselves very upright when they are nearing steps. If you are leaning forward when you come suddenly to steps you are very apt to plunge down them headlong.

In an unfamiliar room the position of a chair or a sofa should be indicated to a blind man by placing his hand upon the back—most carefully should be avoided any attempt to push him into the proper position. Nor should a blind man when alone ever assume that he can safely sit down because he has felt with his hand the arm of a seat. By the touch of the legs he must make sure that the seat is behind him. This use of the legs is a very important habit to acquire. A great many blind people get firmly rooted in the way of stooping over and feeling for a seat before they sit on it, a quite unnecessary habit and one that gives to the onlooker an impression of helplessness. One can easily get into the way of touching the edge of the seat with one's calves, and making sure of the

position of a fender, for instance, by a touch with the toe that passes almost unnoticed.

To count the number of steps necessary in crossing a room or walking along a passage is at first a help, though familiarity should soon render this unnecessary. Often when moving about a house a creaking board—and it is curious for a newly-blinded person to find how faithfully a board creaks—will give all the indication that is needed. A clock with a good, sensible tick is a great help in enabling one to locate one's exact position in a room and to move about it with ease and accuracy. By following its unostentatious signalling the blind man finds himself moving about a room in a way that occasions surprise to people who do not realise the help given by that little guide on the mantelpiece. In winter time the crackle of a fire may give a hint of direction. For the rest, the lightest touch on walls or pieces of furniture enables the blind man to know just where he is.

All the same, blind people must be constantly on their guard. They, more than

anyone else, must think what they are doing. Thus if one drops anything on the floor one is apt to stoop down quickly to pick it up, and perhaps because of the direction of the sound made by the dropped object to turn slightly before stooping, and should one happen to be near a chair or a table a nasty blow in the face may result. Unless quite sure of one's position it is always a good plan to hold a hand before the face when stooping.

An important point to be remembered by those who can see is to speak when they enter a room where a blind man is—for the least word from a familiar voice is all the indication he needs as to who has come in, but without this he is often left in doubt.

Similarly, when a group of people, including one or more who are blind, are engaged in conversation its seeing members should always, when within reach, lightly touch a blind man when addressing him, if they do not mention his name, thus making up for the turned face and quick glance which form unconscious signals between those who can see.

Getting About



IN general, a newly-blinded man soon gets to find his way easily enough about a limited district which becomes familiar—how far it is wise to venture at hazard into new streets is a very debatable point. Pitfalls made by pavement repairs, open coal-traps, bicycles leaning against railings, ladders sloping up from roadway to window, are some of the many dangers which the blind solitary pedestrian may encounter. Old hands become surprisingly expert in sensing and avoiding these and similar dangers. In this, as in everything else, it is only practice that can make perfect, and a blind man must either make up his mind to take risks, and by encountering them learn to avoid them, or must eschew solitary walks in unfamiliar places.

And now about the use of a walking-stick.

Not long after my sight went I gave up the use of one unless I was walking by myself in a place I did not know well or was going with someone for a tramp over rough country with ditches and other obstacles to negotiate. I am quite sure that I got along much better without a stick than I did when I depended upon one. I walked more naturally, more freely, and felt more confident. The experience of the men of St. Dunstan's who accustomed themselves to this habit agreed with mine.

As a rule blind people carry heavy sticks. This is wrong. The stick should be regarded as an elongation of the arm, and the lighter it is the more useful it will prove. A heavy stick is all right for the blind beggar who wants to attract attention by lusty bangs on the pavement. To tap the ground at all is unnecessary; the stick, if used to help in guiding one, should be carried with the point in advance lightly touching the ground or just above it and perhaps moving from side to side. If one is walking with a wall, bank

or paling on one side, occasional light sideway taps with a stick will keep the tyro in the proper position. If walking by the kerb, the stick can be used in the same way, touching the edge of the kerb; but the newly-blinded man must remember that lamp-posts usually stand on the edge of a pavement. Unless it is known that there are none about, the distance kept from the kerb must be great enough to avoid colliding with them. On the whole, the middle of the pavement is the safest place. The blinded man soon is able to distinguish by his footfall whether he is passing over pavement, stone, asphalt, wood, gravel or macadam road, and in this way gains useful information as to his whereabouts. The curved surface of a garden path or a road serves to indicate whether he is in the middle or at one side.

The man beginning to find his way about should pay particular attention to this curve. I remember in my early days of blindness being surprised when a very expert blind man laughed at the idea of tripping over

kerbs. His secret was the very simple one of observing the dip of the road. This dip is the rule with, I think, no exceptions.

The walker will be astonished at his power to remember little details of the way that are of immense help—hearing of course assists him, and also the sense of smell.

I may mention a trifling experience of my own. At the time it happened I often went for a walk before breakfast—from my house to the end of the street. There were three side streets to be crossed, and one morning, just as I was passing one of them, I heard a cart approach. I slowed up, the cart stopped just in front of me, I walked round it and continued on my way. A few yards further on a friend overtook me. He said, “By Jove, it was wonderful to see the way you avoided that cart. I made sure you were going to run into it.”

“Why?” said I.

“Because of its unusual length,” was the reply.

“Well, now,” I said, “think for a moment

of what I had to do. When the cart stopped I knew that the horse was immediately in front of me, for I could hear him breathing. I smelt the smell of the tarred coal-bags—so I knew it was a coal-cart, and therefore a long one, so I made a good wide detour, and here I am.”

“Wonderful !” said my companion.

“Not at all,” I replied ; “with the aid of my hearing and smell I learnt what your sense of sight told you. We arrived at the same conclusions by different methods, that is all.”

In the same way a friend with whom I was once walking home was very surprised when I stopped at the right house, which he had been led by our conversation to overshoot. My ear had detected the familiar sound of the slight echo resulting from the fact that the house has a porch, unlike that of any other near to it. He said that he thought it marvellous that I had been able to keep count of the number of steps from the last cross-road and at the same time continue

our talk. I am not quite sure that he yet believes my simple explanation of the matter, for he himself was quite unable to detect the echo that had guided me.

A friend of mine who has been without sight for twenty-four years, and who is particularly expert in getting about alone, says :—

“ It is extraordinary how useful the sense of smell may prove in getting about alone. In picking out a particular shop in a long row it is often the only guide. Almost every shop has its own distinctive smell which has been familiar to us from childhood, though we may never before have had reason to turn this familiarity to account.

“ The crossing of busy thoroughfares must always remain a difficulty, but let us not scorn to seek the assistance of a passer-by. Thoroughfares of a less busy nature can easily be adventured alone. Particular dangers are the slow-going horse-drawn vehicle—moving so slowly that a man is tempted to cut across in front of it, forget-

ting that the noise it makes may cover the approach of a quiet fast-travelling car—the bicycle, and the stationary vehicle drawn up by the side of the kerb. It is well to remember that it is always safest to cross the road in a leisurely manner and, if in a tight corner, to stand still and let the traffic avoid you.”

Enough has been said, I think, to show how the blind person can and does learn to get about alone. But in most cases when any distance has to be covered he is apt to be happier in the company of someone with sight, not only because more rapid progress can be made, but because the conversation enables him to visualise his surroundings, the most casual references helping to create those internal illustrations that take the place of actual scenes.

The commonest mistake which is made by kindly folk who want to help a blind person along is to believe that because he cannot see he cannot move without support. We folk who cannot see all know the well-intentioned

guide who seizes one forcibly by the arm and half supports, half pulls one about, using a little extra muscular vigour when steps have to be negotiated.

A guide should realise that all a blind man needs in the way of assistance is the gentlest directing pressure. A blind person when forcibly seized should always ask the guide to be good enough either to rest a hand on his arm or allow his own arm to be touched. I think it is the proper plan that a blind person should touch the arm of his guide when obstacles such as furniture in a room or rough places out of doors have to be negotiated, keeping slightly in the rear and gaining knowledge of what to do from the guide's own movements. In some cases, however, where sensitiveness of touch has not been acquired it is better for the guide to take the blind person by the arm under these conditions.

When going for a brisk walk it will at first be found the best plan to put one hand in a coat-pocket and let the guide's hand rest

gently inside the arm. The guide and guided should keep step. The guide will be able by gentle pressure at precisely the right moment to give warning of a step up or down in such a way that the pace need not be slackened at all. If there are more steps than one the fact should be mentioned. Steps should be trodden squarely and not slantwise, as this is apt to lead to stumbling and the spraining of ankles. The endeavour of the guide should be to enable the blind man to pursue his way freely and naturally, using his own initiative and perception to the greatest possible extent.

As a rule, walking arm-in-arm is continued after it has become unnecessary. I am very clear as to the great advantages of walking without any contact at all between the walkers. It is surprisingly easy to do this so long as the sighted pedestrian remembers to give warning by word or touch of any awkward obstacle. When walking along a fairly clear road it is perfectly easy to proceed without any open help from the guide,

at first walking in such a manner that elbows touch, and afterwards getting into the way of keeping in the proper position by the sense of hearing only.

It is well that walks should at first be taken in quiet places, where the noise of passers-by and wheeled traffic does not disturb movements which are still uncertain.

When a path traversed is not wide enough to allow of the passage of two people abreast, the blind person can very well follow his companion by the sound of his footsteps. When the pathway is winding or uneven, an excellent plan is to make use of a walking-stick. If the guide holds the stick in the right hand, the blind person should hold it in his right hand also, and *vice versa*, in order that the movements of the guide may be accurately transmitted to the guided and warn him of changes of direction and inequalities of the road. After a little practice, a handkerchief, one corner held by the guide behind his back, the other corner held by the guided, will answer the same purpose as a stick.

The pleasure of a blind man's walk is increased in proportion to the alertness of his guide, the skill with which hints and directions are conveyed without breaking in abruptly on the conversation, and the care that is taken to speak naturally of anything worth noting by the way.

I would like to impress upon people who are about a good deal with those who cannot see the great importance of cultivating the powers of description. If a blind person is to reach the standard of normality at which he should aim, it is obvious that he must be very largely dependent upon the descriptions which he receives from those who are with him during his daily life. These descriptions may be of so meagre a nature as to leave him almost ignorant of the persons, scenes or things which they are intended to portray; or they may be so full and complete that he is able to conjure up a really accurate picture of what is described.

Of course there is a wide world of difference

between these two extremes, but my own experience leads me to the belief that very few people indeed have a natural gift of describing what they see in terms which call up in the mind of the listener a really true picture. By this, I mean a picture true enough to enable the person to whom it has been given to convey it to someone else.

The knack of accurate description can be cultivated by almost everyone. The great thing is to go enough into detail. For instance, when describing a person it is not sufficient to say that the hair is brown, the shade of brown should be given as nearly as may be. If possible, it is always a good plan to say that the feature which is being described is like one belonging to someone whom the listener knows.

And so with scenery. Always try to compare a scene with one with which the blind person to whom you are speaking is familiar. Almost invariably there are to be found some points of resemblance to already well-known people or places.

An escort, however efficient, will never object to a hint from the blind person escorted, and I think it is a great mistake to be afraid of hurting the feelings of one's escort by making suggestions. I always ask anyone with whom I am walking to let me know if we are about to meet some one whom the escort knows to be a friend or an acquaintance of mine. This saves the awkwardness of being suddenly spoken to by a person of whose identity one is not certain. Again, it enables one to take off one's hat to a lady whom one is passing, and generally to conduct oneself in an ordinary and normal manner.

Nothing gives people who can see a more favourable impression of the ability of a blind man than to find him able to get about freely and well by himself; and as the main thing we have to do is to impress the public with the fact that the loss of sight has not—as is so often thought to be the case—had a fatal effect upon our intelligence and ability, we should all of us, I think, make a very

particular effort towards the greatest possible degree of independence in getting about by ourselves. The idea of regarding oneself, and becoming regarded, not as just a blind man, but as a normal person who cannot see, will be helped to an incredible degree by independence of locomotion.

Once I had a letter from an old St. Dunstaner who, though he cannot see at all, possesses two quite normal-looking eyes. He wanted to know whether I would take up the question of initiating some badge which folk like himself could wear and which the public would recognise as indicating that the wearers of it are blind.

My correspondent complained that he was often barged into when in busy thoroughfares, and thought that a badge such as he suggested would save this.

Undoubtedly it would, but I think a far simpler plan is the one which I myself adopt, and which is to shut one's eyes when one finds oneself in busy surroundings.

To the blinded soldiers I constantly said :

“Cultivate and cultivate your sense of hearing.” A newly-blinded person is inclined to depend far too much upon the touch and too little upon the hearing. There are all sorts of sounds about never noticed so long as the eye is there to help, but which without its aid are full of meaning.

Nor does this advice apply merely to the practical objects of getting about and doing things. The extent to which the sense of smell has the power of awakening memories, reviving in the mind forgotten scenes and experiences that we recall with delight is well known. And through sound comes a vivid excitement of the imaginative faculties. In poetry of a certain order the most pictorial effects are obtained not by the description of things seen, but of sounds. Certainly the sounds heard on a country walk—especially with the extra refinement of hearing that a blind man acquires—bring a hundred scenes before the mind. And it is curious how delightful harsh sounds may become through the effect of association

—the rattle of a lawn-mower, of a machine cutting hay, or the clatter of milk-pails. Even the noises of a city may have their charm, and the careful blind listener is able to pick up clues to a great variety of events that otherwise would escape his notice and his interest.

I have already referred to the great importance of visualising. I have a firm belief in practising this, not only in regard to persons and places which are about one, but by making a regular habit of seeing in the mind's eye places and happenings which belong to days gone by.

During the four or five years before my sight left me I played golf very keenly. It is, of course, a game which one can play well enough to enjoy when one's sight has become too defective to permit one to play any other. I played on a great many golf courses at home and abroad, and now I often find a real enjoyment in going over those courses hole by hole and hazard by hazard. During the last six years I have

played and thoroughly enjoyed many a round of golf in my imagination, particularly on the course which I laid out myself after my sight began to fail, in the place which I then owned in Surrey. I have sometimes gone back, too, to games of cricket, football, or lawn tennis with much zest and interest. I am sure that all people who have lost their sight late enough in life to remember the world as it appeared to them will get a lot of fun out of this mental reminiscing if they try it.

One of the most gratifying things that we people who have lost our sight have to think of is that as the years go on we shall become more and more adept blind men. The blind friend whom I have already mentioned as getting about by himself almost miraculously, told me the other day that during the whole of the years that he has been blind he has continued to improve, and that he is sure he will go on improving as long as his life lasts. To this testimony I can add my own, for I am very conscious of the fact that I miss my sight

less and less. I now find myself doing things unconsciously over which a great deal of care and thought was necessary a year or two ago, and all newly-blinded people will have the same experience as time goes by. The plain fact is that an intelligent blinded person becomes more and more normal and less and less blind every year he lives.

Never think because you are blind that you have got to stay in your own neighbourhoods, to potter about your own districts, where you know what and where everything is. Go out, see the world as it is, whether at home or abroad.

You may say, "Ah! but you want a very intelligent companion." To some extent, yes, but still more you want an intelligent head. An intelligent companion is unquestionably of very great help, but it is your own intelligence that has got to inform you. It is your own questions and the answers you get to them that will help you. The answer to one question will lead you to another, and it is the exercise of your own

intelligence and the application of that intelligence to the conditions in which you now find yourselves which will enable you to go where you like, see everything there is to be seen, and come away with just as good and clear an impression as anybody else in the world could obtain.

Learning to Read and Write

Chapter III Learning to Read and Write

IF the first step for the newly-blinded is to learn to get about by himself and to look after himself in the ordinary matters of daily life, the next is to learn to read and write in the language of the blind.

Of course neither eyes nor finger-tips really read, but only convey the sense to the brain, and the change merely consists in using one nerve-channel—it is true a more clumsy one—instead of another. After all, the real problem with which the blinded man has to contend is the learning to do the old things in a new way; there can, it seems to me, be no better exemplification of this than lies in learning to read with the finger-tips instead of the eyes.

The study of Braille quickens to a surprising extent those faculties on which the blind man has to rely. Learning to read

by a new method undoubtedly helps a man to learn to do many other things in unaccustomed ways. I go so far as to say that it would well repay a man to learn Braille even if he were never to read a line of a Braille book; of so much value is the exercise and stimulus it gives to the mental faculties.

In 1829 Louis Braille, a blind Frenchman, invented this embossed alphabet in which the characters are formed by arrangement of six dots placed in an oblong of which the vertical side consists of three and the horizontal of two. With different combinations of these dots all the signs and contractions are made up.

Beginners start their Braille lessons with large dots, about the size of peppercorns, and come by degrees to the small dots that are ordinarily used. It is not so difficult to memorise the signs and contractions, but the finger has to be taught to distinguish them. There are a lucky few who possess naturally a very sensitive touch, and it is curious that a man whose hand has been

roughened by manual toil is just as likely to display this special sense of touch as another whose fingers are more delicate.

One of the many fallacies that is possessed by people who can see about people who cannot is the idea that immediately the sense of sight is lost an exquisitely delicate sense of touch evolves itself. This is not the case. Every human being has a natural sense of touch, good, bad, or indifferent, and with the vast majority the quality of touch possessed by the individual is never known from birth to death. Those who find their Braille touch lacking in sensitiveness are advised to vaseline or otherwise grease their finger-tips when they go to bed and to sleep with a glove on. This helps to a surprising extent.

Braille writing is done either by hand, when a small punch is used, or by an ingenious little Braille writing machine which has six keys to correspond with the six dots which have to be raised for the fingers of the blind reader to follow; the writing by

hand is done on the reverse side of the sheet and, consequently, from right to left, so that when turned over it is read from left to right in the ordinary way. Both sides of a sheet can be written on, the space between the raised lines on one side being used to contain the letters on the other side. In printing books in Braille, besides this system of interlining, another method, known as inter-pointing is used,—when the dots on one side fall between the dots on the other side on the same line. For beginners the interlined books are somewhat easier to read, but the inter-point system is preferable, as more words can of course be set on a page by this method.

There is not the least doubt that the loss of sight quickens and develops the other senses. The brain of the blind man is much more actively employed than the brain of a person who can see. He is always consciously thinking—whether he is walking or feeding or dressing himself—whatever he is doing, and I am perfectly sure that this

increase of the need for thought develops the brain of the blind man just as increase of activity will develop the muscles of the athlete. Thus the blind man is able to do things both in regard to Braille reading and other pursuits and industries in a manner that he would never have been able so quickly to accomplish had he been in full possession of his sight.

Without decrying the pleasure of being read to, there is for the blinded man a special delight in being able to read to himself, above all because in this way is provided a resource which enables him to fill in any unoccupied time when he happens to be alone. It gives him entrance to the world of books and brings back to him some of the independence he has lost.

There is another form of embossed printing known as Moon type. The drawback to the Moon type is that it occupies much more space than Braille; moreover, it cannot be *written* as Braille can.

Most of the characters in Moon type are

either unaltered or slightly modified forms of the Roman letters : the complete alphabet consists of only nine distinct characters of the simplest form utilised in various positions. Eight of the Roman letters are used unaltered, fourteen others have parts left out, and five new and very simple forms are added. There are a few simple contractions, and the whole system is one that can be learned with the greatest ease by anyone of ordinary ability. It will thus be readily understood that when a man or woman goes blind late in life it is far easier for them to master a simple system such as Moon, than the far more handy and comprehensive system of Braille.

There are a great many blind people who, having read Braille for a great number of years, with advancing age are glad to fall back on a system which does not require great delicacy of touch, and which does not possess the manifold contractions that a failing memory may forget.

Not only books, but monthly magazines and weekly newspapers are produced in

embossed type—and between blind people correspondence by this medium is carried on without the need of relying on a sighted person to read aloud the letters received.

To be able to write in Braille is a great advantage in that it enables a blind man to record and read his own notes and attend personally to his private and business papers.

But though the blinded person who has learned Braille can keep records and accounts which he is able to read, and can write to others who are blind, there remains the question of his correspondence with people who can see.

Those who lose their sight in infancy can never learn to write in a really practical manner; and those who can already write when they become blind are seldom able to continue for long to do so legibly.

It is true that by the use of a writing-frame, of which there are several kinds, people who lose their sight can continue to write by hand. But the frame does not prevent the deterioration of the handwriting,

which happens more or less rapidly according to the individual, and arises from the fact that the eye is no longer able to correct the mistakes which the hand makes and which therefore tend to become more and more accentuated. The two most noticeable instances of this are making the characters too small and omitting to carry the hand forward fast enough.

The way out of this difficulty is for the blinded man to use a typewriter.

It is not perhaps generally known that the first writing machine was invented for the blind, and typewriting is by no means a difficult accomplishment for blind people to master. Nor is a special kind of machine employed. There are no raised letters on the keys, and the only peculiarity to be noticed on the machine for the use of the blind is the embossed scale which takes the place of the usual engraved scale, and which makes it possible for the operator to tell by touch instead of by sight the position of the carriage.

The drawbacks that the blinded typist experiences are just those which anyone else would encounter who attempted to work in the dark—as when he writes a letter unconscious that the ribbon is useless, or, as once happened, when a man by mistake seated himself at a machine with a special keyboard and all his work was, of course, wasted. Obviously he must depend on the help of someone who can see to know what he has written and, in the case of interruption, the last word he has typed.

However, the mere ability to use a typewriter is of small advantage to a blinded man who seeks engagement in an office. Shorthand should also be learned. That, indeed, to people uninitiated in the ways of the blind world must seem an impossible accomplishment for blind folks.

Of course the blind stenographer cannot use any of the ordinary methods employed by sighted people. The system used is a specially devised form of Braille.

There are about 150 initial, medial and

final contractions, in addition to signs for some 500 words and phrases such as most frequently occur in commercial correspondence. It follows that an alert and retentive memory is essential.

Shorthand is taken down on a handy little machine. A thin paper ribbon passes through it, and on this the signs denoting the various words and phrases are embossed by six styles actuated by six keys. A seventh key, situated in the centre of the others, works the spacing mechanism. By an ingenious arrangement, the space is made at the same time as the last sign of a word or group of words is embossed, so that the writer can carry on immediately with the next word or phrase. It is estimated that this device saves at least 20 per cent. of time.

For reading the notes the paper is run through a guide, a piece of wood about nine inches long, in the middle of which is a shallow groove, the exact width of the paper.

This guide is attached to a typewriter, so

that the operator's notes are just before him to feel as he transcribes them.

It is the expert typist and shorthand-writer who is best equipped to take up another of the more complicated occupations for the blind. I refer to telephone-operating, which also must seem a very strange thing for a blind person to learn.

The memory of the trained blind operator for numbers becomes astonishing, and I imagine is seldom equalled by those who can see.

A private branch exchange telephonist generally works alone in a small sound-proof room. Independence of the right sort is, therefore, the outstanding qualification of a good operator, who must be relied upon to do everything himself.

The blind person cannot, of course, work in a public exchange where the flashlight system is in vogue, but he is able to use the drop shutter switchboards which are to be found in practically all large buildings, offices and business houses in this country.

In actual work the operator gets to know the peculiar nature of his employer's business ; he memorises the telephone numbers most frequently used, and jots down in Braille the less common numbers or waiting messages, so that he can refer to them at any time without assistance.

Profitable Occupations

MASSAGE may be said to be the one occupation for which the peculiar qualifications of the blind man render him not merely as good as but positively better than the man who can see.

The sensitiveness and delicacy of touch which come to characterise blind people make massage an ideal occupation for them.

The blind masseurs trained at St. Dunstan's were able, without exception, to start earning very substantial amounts.

The course of training may be regarded by many as somewhat lengthy, lasting as it does from a year to eighteen months, or even longer.

First a good working knowledge of the structure and functions of the human body must be acquired. The student begins by

tackling the numerous bones which form the framework on which the soft tissues of the body are built up. When he has mastered their names, positions, bony prominences, depressions, surfaces and borders, and the many muscles and ligaments attached to them, he passes on to the study of the joints, the various movements of which they are capable, and the ligamentous bands which keep in place the bones forming them. He then studies the muscles which move these joints, learning exactly where they are fastened to the bones, and what movements they will perform by their contraction. Then follows the study of the blood-vessels which nourish these muscles and the nerves which put them into action. Then he must attack the internal organs and understand their structure, position and peculiar use to the body. When all this has been mastered, he passes on to the study of the various diseases which may be treated by massage, and the various movements appropriate for their individual treatment. All this time he has

been learning and practising the somewhat numerous massage movements, the acquisition of which demands a great deal of patience and perseverance.

POULTRY-FARMING

Poultry-farming is another form of work that demands very real application. There are a number of our blinded soldiers settled in different parts of the country who are pursuing it with all the ability requisite to provide them with a comfortable livelihood for the future.

The course in our Country Life Section at St. Dunstan's was divided into two periods of six weeks, each period ending with an examination conducted by some well-known poultry expert.

Instruction was started in the classification of breeds, the blinded soldiers being taught to distinguish the various breeds and varieties by touch. In quite a short time they learned to tell the different breeds by feeling

the combs, wattles, weight and plumage, and by the same methods they could also distinguish between males and females.

“ I saw,” wrote a visitor to St. Dunstan’s, “ one man having a lesson on how to use an incubator; that man was not only totally blind, but had lost one arm and a finger and thumb off the other hand, but with his three fingers and a stump he could select any fowl out of the nine or ten different kinds and tell you the breed of each.”

The next subject taken was feeding and the mixing of foods, the different varieties of food were put in small tins, and each was handled in turn, until the pupil was able to distinguish between all varieties by either touch, smell or taste. When this was mastered he was taught how to mix and prepare the foods and how to vary them according to the needs of his fowls.

The men were taught to make working models of the standard chicken-houses and runs which are used by all St. Dunstan’s

poultrymen. In making these they learned how they were constructed and used, and were able to make the larger houses later on.

Instruction followed in the breeding and rearing of chicks, both by natural and artificial means. Artificial incubation was carefully dealt with, the blinded soldier being taught to look after the incubator himself, with only the assistance of a sighted person in reading the temperature of his thermometer and trimming the lamp.

Among the other points touched on were the care of the chicks when hatched, the cure or prevention of the various forms of disease to which fowls are subject, the marketing of eggs, and the preparation of birds for the table.

Lessons were given in the care of ducks and turkeys, while the men could go through a course of rabbit breeding and keeping, an excellent adjunct to poultry-farming.

Gardening, too, was taught to enable a blinded man to grow his own vegetables and

more particularly to produce foodstuffs for his birds.

The men learned to build chicken-houses, nesting-boxes, and to make runs, gates, and to do any other carpentry work which might be found useful on a poultry-farm.

Handicrafts for the Blind

*Basketry, Mat-making, Boot-repairing,
Joinery and Netting*

BASKET-MAKING is the oldest and most universally established industry for the blind. There is no basket-making machinery. Every basket the world over is made by hand, and blind people can learn to make them just as well—and with practice almost as quickly—as can anyone else.

In the main, two different kinds of material are used in the manufacture of baskets; and the trade is, therefore, divided into two classes, centre cane work and willow work. The cane which is used in the manufacture of the former kind of basket is more easily handled, and this branch was therefore better suited to those men of St. Dunstan's whose injuries forbade them to stoop, or some of whose fingers were missing or damaged.

Light basketry also proves itself to be an excellent adjunct to other trades, for the work is done on a table, very little space and only a few tools being required. Among the many varieties of articles which can be made in centre cane are tea-trays, shopping baskets, work-baskets, waste-paper and every other sort of ornamental basket.

Willow is thicker and less pliable than cane, and it follows that greater strength and skill is required in using it. The work is done on the floor, the man sitting on a "plank" with his work on a lapboard between his outstretched legs. The skill of "working" each "rod" has also to be gained, as each one has its natural variation in growth.

The process by which a basket is made of cane or of willow is practically the same, but there is a good deal more to be learnt in the latter branch of the trade. For instance, willows have to be soaked in water to make them pliable and easily workable, the different thicknesses of willow being immersed for varying times, and the blind

craftsman had to learn to sew in linings of hampers, fix wooden battens, metal hinges and locks, and so on.

MAT-MAKING

Like basket-making, mat-making is a well-recognised employment for the blind. At St. Dunstan's we taught our men the old-fashioned art of mat-making on a hand-frame. It has the disadvantage of being rather monotonous, but it is an occupation at which a man can quite easily make a very satisfactory income by working six or seven hours a day.

Mats are made of various sizes, and the measure-stick has raised marks upon it, indicating feet and inches. Great care must be taken in making the measurements exact, as mats are frequently ordered to fit into "wells" in doorways, and an error of half an inch constitutes a serious defect.

When the mat is finished to size it is cut down from the frame and carried to the bordering table, where it is placed face

downwards, and an edging of stout plait is sewn around its sides with a packing-needle, and when that is done the article is finished, all but the shearing.

BOOT-REPAIRING

The most largely followed occupation taught at St. Dunstan's was boot-repairing—cobbling is the old-fashioned word, and "snobbing" was the pet name for it among the men of St. Dunstan's.

The blind cobbler acquired in the short period of his training at St. Dunstan's the ability to sole and heel a pair of boots just as well as anybody in the kingdom could do it. I encouraged the cobblers to combine with their work mat-making, because the one disadvantage of cobbling is that the work may come irregularly; there may be twenty pairs of boots to repair one week and only half a dozen the next. In a slack week the man can make a few mats and have the advantage of a change of work.

The tools that the blind cobbler uses are,

generally speaking, the same as those of the ordinary workman, but ingenious little punchers, for measuring the exact distance between the rivets on both sole and heel, and making the necessary indents in the leather, help him considerably. Having made these indents he is able to distinguish them with his fingers and insert the rivets unerringly, hammering each one home as he fixes it. A little plane is used for removing the rough edges, instead of the knife that the sighted cobbler employs.

JOINERY

The idea of teaching joinery to the blinded soldiers was brought to my mind by hearing of an extraordinarily expert man, I think certainly the most expert blind workman in this country, perhaps in the world, who had lost his sight some sixteen years previously in Sheffield. He was then a thoroughly skilled carpenter. He set himself to many varied occupations in a spirit of adventure, and finally made up his mind to take up his

old work and is to-day just as good a carpenter as any man in the kingdom. If we wanted any carpentry done about the house at St. Dunstan's he came along and did it. It was his aptitude that made me believe that something of the kind could be done by blind people who had not been carpenters.

The speed and certainty with which the blinded soldiers picked up the trade of joinery—for this is perhaps the more correct term by which to designate what they were taught—were not so remarkable as they seemed. It was only required that the learner should bring an unbiassed mind to his task. The tools are practically the same for the sighted and the non-sighted, and the work proceeded on similar lines. The apprentice had only to work with his fingers instead of his eyes.

His rule was marked by notches, so that he could fix his distances by touch and in the same way work to the marks of his scribing knife. Laths were used to guide his sawing, and he made guides to hold his saw when cutting tenons.

Some men did best at small work such as photo-frames, tea-trays, and so forth; others were attracted by the larger kinds, as cupboards, tables, and boxes; others yet again developed a knack for bed-rests, combined meal-tables and reading-stands, bookshelves, medicine cupboards, and similar things.

With the knowledge gained at St. Dunstan's a joiner could embark on varied kinds of work, and we have records of men who started for themselves tackling jobs they had never attempted before by merely adapting their knowledge to new conditions.

NETTING

The remaining occupation that we taught at St. Dunstan's was netting. The lessons were arranged to fit in between periods of strenuous mental or physical effort in the class-rooms and workshops.

It was found that if netting were regarded as a paying hobby or an adjunct to a man's main trade it filled a very satisfactory niche midway between work and recreation.

Hours otherwise empty could be filled, and all waste time redeemed to the benefit of health and pocket.

There is no expensive apparatus required, and the work can be done any time anywhere, indoors or out.

We have thus far dealt with manual occupations which can be practised by a blind person in his own home. But there are trades which essentially belong to a workshop attached to an Institution, and for a civilian blind person who has no pension or other source of income on which to depend, the Institution Workshop affords the greater advantage. In addition to the trades already mentioned, brush-making and the manufacture of bedding afford excellent employment for the blind worker and are among the best paid industries. Machine knitting and weaving are suitable and remunerative occupations for women.

Music and pianoforte tuning are taught in the colleges and larger schools.

Rowing and Outdoor Sports

Chapter VI Rowing and Outdoor Sports

AT St. Dunstan's we attached just as much importance to teaching the men to play as to teaching them their work. If a man can play he can work. Nothing helps a blinded man more to forget his blindness than the discovery that he can still enjoy his hours of recreation.

The big lake of Regent's Park adjoined our grounds, and the blinded soldiers took up rowing with zest and keenness. It is the best of all exercises for one who has lost his sight, for here is something he can do as well as anyone else. This is in itself a tremendous incentive, and an added joy is the feeling that one is reversing the usual order of things and taking someone about instead of being taken.

Anyone who has ever been on the river at night knows that the enjoyment is not lost

because it is dark. The exhilaration of the exercise remains; you feel the boat moving at each stroke, you hear the sound of the sculls dipping in the water, the soft dripping from the feathering blades, the regular movement in the rowlocks. Merely to hear a boat passing in the shadows of a dusky evening is a delight.

And so to the blinded man there is joy in being out on the water, pleasure in the exercise, pleasure in handling the sculls, pleasure in the sense of movement, pleasure in the sounds that are full of pictorial suggestion.

No doubt the delight of idling in a boat on an evening of one of the glorious spring days which helped so much to brighten the beginnings of St. Dunstan's—and particularly when, as was usually the case, the idling was in company with a fair friend—had something to do with the speed with which rowing became popular; but the earliest St. Dunstaners were soon to be found on the lake, early morning, midday and evening,

for the sheer joy of the real exercise which rowing provided. Racing began and soon led to performances that created astonishment in sporting circles.

The arrival of the rowing-men at the water-side in the afternoon was an event that created no little interest among the frequenters of the park.

In their white sweaters and shorts they lined up in the grounds of St. Dunstan's; at a word of command they took a right turn, and then, with a guide at their head, and each man with a hand on the shoulder of the one in front of him, they would break into the double, thread the winding paths of the garden and cross a little piece of the park to the landing stage, whistling and singing as they went. To watch the crews in training for racing embark, to see the oars taking the water in perfect time, was something for the loungers on the lakeside to marvel at.

Racing on the Thames became a regular feature of life at St. Dunstan's; we had

annual regattas of our rowing club, and constantly met and usually defeated other crews.

Rowing was by no means the only outdoor sport which the blinded soldiers enjoyed. Competitions of many kinds were organised, which sometimes took place at St. Dunstan's, sometimes elsewhere, as at the Botanical Gardens or at Ranelagh. At all these events the spectators watched with a sort of amazement the almost reckless abandonment with which the men set out to win. At any form of race—running, hopping, walking, three-legged, sack or wheelbarrow—whatever it was, when once they had toed the line they sprang to the signal to start with an utter forgetfulness of their lack of sight.

When the competitors dashed off helter skelter, the onlookers usually gave a gasp of surprise. They had been expecting a cautious, feel-the-way, travesty of a race in which the men would be seen groping their way forward, helplessly meandering towards the sound of the bell that was their guide to

the winning post. But the St. Dunstaner knew no such method. Trusting in the whistle which told him that the race was ended and the breast-high rope which stopped him if he did not pull up quickly enough, assured that there would be no obstacle in his path, he made for the goal with all the energy of which he was capable.

Physical drill at St. Dunstan's was often given by sergeant-majors, blind like the men they instructed. It was wonderful to notice how they kept in touch with the movements and could detect by ear when a man was not keeping good time with the others.

Tandem cycling was a sport that gave great delight—a sighted man went, of course, with each soldier, but it was always the latter who was making the pace. A cycle for six riders was regularly used, and it was a gay sight to watch the St. Dunstaners propelling this monster round the Outer Circle of the Park.

We tried football with a bell inside the ball, but the experiment never went further

than causing some amusement. Pushball, too, was tried, but was not a brilliant success, for as the huge ball was twisted one way or the other the players got out of touch with it.

Wrestling was practised, and there was an occasional boxing match between men who were already accomplished with the gloves.

Swimming was popular, and some Public Baths, not far from St. Dunstan's, were given up to the sole use of our men at regular times. Quite a large number of men who had never been immersed in a bigger piece of water than that contained in a bath learnt to swim. At first the superintendent of the baths was nervous that the men might come to harm by hitting their heads against the sides of the baths or running into each other in the water. But they had learned to look after themselves. In a short time they were taking headers from the diving-board, boldly dashing from end to end, splashing and ducking each other and playing water-polo

with a floating ball the progress of which they followed by sound.

At the beginning only some half-dozen men took up swimming, then its popularity greatly increased as men found they could learn to swim.

What a splendid form of exercise swimming is for the blind ! What a wonderful sense of freedom there comes when one gets in the sea ! Gone is the need of precaution, of ceaseless watchfulness ! One strikes out boldly through the water with nothing to fear. A word now and then from a companion will keep a blind swimmer's direction—even the word is hardly necessary, for he can follow the movements of another in the water. And one swimming alone can hear and be guided by the surf breaking on the shore, and the shouts and splashings of the mere dippers. In a swimming-bath there are always special sounds—as that made by the waste pipe in the corners—which help a swimmer to know his position. The locality of dressing-rooms and so on is easily learned.

In the baths at a seaside resort where I often swim occurred one of those curious instances which show how difficult it is for a sighted person to realise how independent one who is blind can become, and at the same time the full meaning of blindness.

The attendant was an excellent fellow who always looked after me most carefully. When my swim was over and I approached the steps to get out he was usually at the top of them with the greeting, "There you are, sir. Four steps—one, two, three, four! Now you are at the top, sir!" Then he would pilot me to my dressing cabin and open the door, with the remark: "There's your cabin, sir. Clothes hanging on the right—*looking-glass on the left.*" The curious confusion of thought which led him to suppose that a person who was unable to find the steps or to count up to four could avail himself of the services of a looking-glass always struck me as humorous.

In the later days of St. Dunstan's, tug-of-war contests became very popular. They

provided splendidly hard exercise, and there was very hot competition between the different houses for the cups and medals which were presented. Some well-known Army experts who had been invalided out of the Service coached the teams. Visitors were often astonished to see a dozen men earnestly engaged in a hopeless attempt to pull up by the roots one of the fine oak trees which adorned the grounds; but these apparently crazy fellows were just tug-of-war teams learning the most scientific way to make the best use of their weight and strength. Goal-kicking also became a most popular feature of sport at St. Dunstan's, teams of six contesting against each other with the utmost zest and keenness.

Encouragement to regular exercise is very important for blind people, because a man naturally tends to take less after he has lost his sight than before. It was for this reason that we encouraged at St. Dunstan's early morning walks and organised week-end rambles in the country.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS

Dancing and Indoor Amusements

Chapter VII Dancing & Indoor Amusements

THE blinded soldiers took up dancing with astonishing zest. How well they danced was remarkable. To me it was an immense satisfaction to find them participating in this new way in normal life. It struck people as a wonderful accomplishment for blind men, but what was more wonderful was the spirit that made them so eagerly take a part in this and other forms of amusement.

It was a genuine source of pleasure to them, a spontaneous outlet for that spirit of enjoyment which they found, after all, had not been lost.

A costume dance for the pleasure of blinded people, does it not sound an elaborate mockery? But I doubt if any event ever gave more delight at St. Dunstan's.

I know of no better example of the fact that the loss of sight is a barrier that can

be swept aside. The utmost ingenuity was displayed in devising costumes, the greatest pains were devoted to making them as perfect as possible. Not content with the dance, the men dressed up the next day for a parade in the garden. One of our blinded soldiers, a jockey by profession, appeared in racing colours; a horse was borrowed in order that he might be seen mounted in the photograph that was taken.

Blind people, by the way, can enjoy a play far more than might be supposed; though, of course, some plays are much better than others for those who are only auditors.

The Revue form of entertainment is not, as a rule, to my way of thinking, of great interest to a blind person, unless, of course, the music is of an unusually catchy description and the brand of wit above the average. A great deal of the success of a revue is apt to depend upon byplay and scenic accessories, which are to a large extent lost to the sightless "onlooker." But a good musical play, such, for instance, as those of Gilbert and

Sullivan, full of tuneful songs and witty dialogue, is ideal. Any play which is well packed with interest and incident can scarcely fail to be enjoyed by a blind person, and has a really sound educative value to the newly-blinded. I always encouraged the officers who had lost their sight in the war to go to the play as often as possible. An intelligent companion who with a few whispered words gives one a description of the scenery at the opening of each act, and tells one of silent incidents like a listening character behind a door, will keep one quite adequately acquainted with what is going on. The picking up of the different characters by their voices, and the general appreciation of what is afoot on the stage by movement, intonation and other subtle indications, are, I always think, of real educative value to a person who is learning to be blind. In short, the theatre can be fairly looked upon as a schoolroom as well as a place of interesting entertainment.

The men of St. Dunstan's got up several

revues filled with local jokes and scenes which were performed with immense success. It seemed that there was no end to the talent whenever concerts were organised from our own resources.

So excellent were the voices of some of the men that several were trained to become professional singers. There were many who played well on the piano, and lessons were arranged for all those who elected to go on with their study of music.

As there were violinists as well, and men who performed on the cornet, the trombone, the drum and the cymbals, a band was formed which came to give performances in public and was a remarkable example of what blind musicians can do even when their technical knowledge is limited.

Games of many kinds can be played by the blind. For example, chess and draughts and dominoes. Cards for the use of blind folk are marked at the ends with Braille dots and are recognised by touch practically as swiftly as they are ordinarily recognised

by sight. Similarly the domino stones have raised dots which blind people can accustom themselves to read with alacrity. The deserved popularity of bridge as a game particularly calling for skill and concentration has resulted in the fact that some of the finest bridge players in the country are blind.

Various Experiences

I AM often asked what are the main disadvantages of blindness, and whether I consider that there are any advantages.

The greatest disadvantage is unquestionably the loss of one's independence. This lost independence which at first seems so hopeless of recovery is regained in very large measure as time goes on. Ability once more to read, to conduct one's correspondence, and to get about with ease and certainty in fairly familiar surroundings, are all of them things which tend to a feeling of recovered independence. But even to those who readjust their lives most rapidly and skilfully real independence must always be denied, though, after all, blind people are not so terribly singular in this respect as at first blush seems to be the case, for all members of a civilised community are more or less

dependent upon each other. The baker depends upon the butcher, the butcher upon the baker. So the dependence of a person without sight is not so much unique as it is exaggerated.

Inability to see what is going on around one, to rejoice in the beauty of unfamiliar scenery, and to read emotions on the faces of those with whom one comes in contact, are all of them losses which may be to a large extent made up for by visualisation, and which are remedied in a wonderful degree by use and custom.

A typical small aggravation occurred to me the day before I dictated this paragraph. It was to find myself obliged to take off my thick winter gloves when it was inconvenient to do so in order to discover the time by feeling the face of my watch.

First among the advantages of blindness I would place the unquestionably improved mentality which is quite sure to result. The average human being takes himself as he finds himself and leaves it at that.

For much of his time his doings are practically automatic. It costs him no effort of thought to dress, to eat, to move about, but when blindness comes upon a man all this automatic freedom goes. Practically every action of his life demands thought, and closely concentrated thought at that. This continual mental exercise, this necessity for making the very most of all indications which help one to be normal, has unquestionably a stimulating beneficial effect upon the brain, while the increased necessity for exercising the memory tends to improve greatly that most valuable faculty.

As the years roll by this necessity for constant thought becomes less and less, but by the time this stage is reached the mental improvement has been effected, and I am quite certain that almost every man who passed through St. Dunstan's would agree with me that from the mental point of view he is a far superior human being to the one he was when he possessed his sight.

It must please be remembered by those

who read this little book that the points of view set forth are those of a person who has lost his sight in adult life. Though in many cases they refer equally to people who have always been blind or have lost their sight so early in childhood that no definite recollection of the world remains, in many cases they do not.

And here let me correct a popular fallacy in regard to being "born blind." As a matter of fact no more people are born blind than are born without arms or without legs. Nearly all of the so-called "born blind" people really lost their sight in early infancy.

Very often people who have been practically always blind possess a knowledge of the world and the things in it which they have never seen quite surprising in its accuracy, but at the same time it is plainly impossible that they should really know the world as it is known by people who can see.

What, for instance, of a world without colour? And yet the world must ever be

colourless to those who have practically always been blind. For quite obviously they can have no real impression of colour.

I remember talking about this to a very intelligent middle-aged man who had lost his sight when a few weeks old. He told me that he thought he knew a great deal about colour, and continued, "White to me seems a soft gentle colour; black a mournful sad colour, and red a fierce colour," and then he paused.

"And about the other colours?" I asked.

"Well," said he, "that is all I know about colour."

The views he had with regard to white, black and red are, of course, too obvious to require comment.

An oculist told me once of the case of a woman about thirty years of age, who had been blind from earliest childhood, and whose sight was restored as the result of an operation. He described her as a very bright, intelligent individual. When the bandages were finally removed from her eyes she was

in a room which contained one window. The sun was shining brightly outside, and three sparrows were hopping about on the window-sill. The first words which fell from her lips were, "Why, look at those three candle-flames!" Presumably the brilliant sunshine seemed to her like a flame; she had no doubt heard of the dancing flames and thus associated the little hopping sparrows with the light.

But fancy how unreal the world must have been to a mind which could imagine a sparrow as a candle-flame!

A friend of mine told me that he had once taken a little blind boy for a walk in the country. They met some cows, and it transpired that the blind boy knew that a cow had four legs, but thought that they were like his own. Why should he not? But how oddly unreal his mental picture of a cow!

I hope that not long after this book is published every school for blind children in the kingdom will have a most ample

supply of models of all the more common objects in the world, for it is only by the sense of touch that people who have never possessed their sight can form an idea of objects as they really are.

In very many ways people who have practically always been blind are tremendously in advance of those who lose their sight so late in life that a definitely real impression of the world remains with them. When other senses and perceptions than sight have always had to be relied upon they naturally acquire a degree of usefulness which it is impossible to expect in the case of senses which have for a lesser or greater number of years been dominated, and as it were suppressed, by the overpoweringly useful sense of sight. But as the illustrations which I have just given show, people who have not always been blind are in many ways in an immeasurably superior position to those who have always had to live their lives without the aid of vision.

The subject of the dreams of blind men

is interesting. In my dreams I am never blind. Then I see as I used to; and if I dream of something bringing in people whom I have only known since I lost my sight, they are, unless I have become very intimately acquainted with them, people whose faces are indistinct, though somehow I know who they are. I have never dreamed about a place that I did not know before I was blind. I am reminded of the story of Milton, who, on saying "Good night" to his daughters, added: "May it, indeed, be as good to you as to me. You know night brings back my day; I am not blind in my dreams."

In regard to the dreams of those who have always been blind an old journalistic friend of mine sent me the following note:

"Years ago, when in New York, I was writing a series of articles on the general topic of dreams, and the idea came to me that it would be interesting to know what 'always blind' people dream about. I made many inquiries, and saw a great many blind people. The net result, which, doubtless,

you already are familiar with, was to learn that this class of blind people seldom dreams at all. I have heard people say how interesting it would be to know what 'always blind' people see in their dreams. I quickly learned that they do not 'see' anything. One professor of mathematics told me that the nearest he came to understand what I meant by 'seeing' was that a brass band was red in colour! Some of the people I saw confessed to having nightmares, and the dream was almost identical in each case; that of being pursued by a wolf or a bear (which they knew by its barks or growls), and being chased up a tree. The net result of all my investigations at the time was that no one ever dreams of anything that is not somehow connected with something they have previously seen, or heard about, or experienced."

Visitors to St. Dunstan's were generally surprised to notice that the habit of smoking was almost universal among the men. The idea that blind people find no enjoyment in

tobacco is one of those odd' little pieces of misinformation which, in some extraordinary way, get repeated until almost everyone accepts them as true. Certainly one of the pleasures of smoking is lost to one who cannot see the smoke, yet it remains not only a pleasure but a solace to the blinded man. At St. Dunstan's the men smoked at work as well as at other times. Pipes were not commonly used; it was the cigarette that was popular.

On the subject of the psychology of blindness a friend of mine writes:—

Certain it is that some time or other—maybe for a long period, generally for quite a short one—the blinded man has to go through his “bad time.” And this is the moment when every available outside help is required. Also, it may here be said that the greatest difficulty which the recently blinded have to contend with during this depressing period is to encounter the right man or woman with the “right” point of view. They may find a dozen who will

mingle their tears with their own, where they will only find one who will make them laugh. Here, let me add for the benefit of those who would help the blinded man or woman through this "bad time," one of the easiest pitfalls, but also one of the most disastrous, is to let the blind person perceive that your cheerfulness is, as it were, cheerfulness with a very definite object.

In our own troubles, do we not find that the quickest way to forget them is to go right away from anything and everyone who may remind us of them? It is the same with the blinded man and his misfortune. His greatest need is to be treated *normally* in his abnormal circumstances. It is his greatest need; it is also his greatest difficulty. Above all, he resembles you and me in our troubles in that, when his depression has, as it were, reached the crisis, he is best left alone altogether. Depression is like almost every other disease, it has its period of incubation, its "crisis" and its convalescence. Were the "crisis" never

to pass away, the man must necessarily go mad and death would be the only way out—and this applies to our own depression of spirits just as much as to that of the blinded sailor or soldier. During the crisis, all that is needed is care and unobtrusive kindness—the worst will pass sooner or later; there is nothing to be done *actively* until it is gone.

To prevent these fits of depression coming on; to help to bring forgetfulness when the weight of the misery is being lifted by Nature—this is all that the outside world can do to help the blinded man in his misfortune.

And this brings me back once more to that great difficulty which all blinded folk seem to meet—the difficulty of being taken normally and not as some abnormal subject for whom only abnormal methods are possible. I would like to write up, in letters a yard high in the houses where blind folk live, the words “*Try your best to make the blind forget that they are blind by trying to forget it yourself.*” By this I do not

mean to say, of course, that the person who is looking after blind folk must let them learn wisdom by doing nothing at all to help them. There are certain things which the blind man cannot do for himself and which you must do for him. He will realise these things just as you, who seek to help him, will realise them too. He will come to you for help almost unconsciously, just as you will be there—almost unconsciously too—to proffer your aid. After a short time these facts will be realised by you both, and will become so much a matter of course that, if there be any danger at all, it will lie in the helper forgetting himself so far as to proffer the same help to people who possess their normal sight. But until these aids become unconscious, both on the part of the blinded man and on the part of the man or woman who would help him, the blind will always be reminded that they cannot see. It is for those who help to realise as quickly as they can that the greatest aid which anyone can render a

blind person is to make him forget his blindness. There are so many people who seem to show by their actions that they verily believe that, when a man loses his sight, he also loses his hearing, his reason and his whole individuality. It is quite a common occurrence for me to be asked if Mr. So-and-so takes sugar in his tea when, all the while, he is there to be asked. Happily, most blind men can laugh at such ignorance, but one never knows how deeply this lack of tact may scar the heart behind the laughter. And that is why it is so important that this perpetual reminding, by stupid little tactless acts and words, should be stamped out from the very first. Strange as it may sound to the uninitiated, it is far better to do too little in the way of the "helping hand" than too much. It is dreadful when the blind man comes to some hurt through his own blindness, but it is better that he should occasionally receive some hurt than that he should never venture to go out and do things "on his own."

And if you must help him now and then—as, of course, you must—make your helpfulness as unobtrusive as you possibly can.

Contrary to general belief, I have discovered that very few psychological changes take place in the blinded man owing to his blindness. The man who was morose before he lost his sight will be morose afterwards; the cheerful one before will be equally cheerful when he is blind; the pessimist will look on the dreary side of things; the optimist will still remain optimistic. If there be any real change in the natures of some men, it is generally in those who possess weak characters or colourless ones. These may perhaps follow, as it were, the line of least resistance—just as they would otherwise have done had they never lost their sight, with, perhaps, the pace a little more accelerated on account of their blindness. So long as the blinded man is not, as it were, thrust into a special world alone, he will always remain his normal self. So long as he feels

that he is leading an average normal life, so long will he be average normal. The greatest danger which besets him is that of being made to think too seriously and too long about his blindness. It is so to contrive that he avoids this danger as much as possible which is the duty of all those who love and respect him. The chief thing to remember is that, living in darkness as he does, he cannot throw off evil thoughts as we can by change of scene; he cannot find forgetfulness in watching and observing the life around him. Thus it is doubly necessary that all the things which he can indulge in should be found for him to do. *He must be brought into the life which surrounds him.* And he must be brought into this life as a man who, except for his handicap, is as full of hope and life and energy and forcefulness as any man; who is equal, if not superior, to all those with whom he comes in contact. Thus, in spite of his misfortune, he will be a *happy* blind man—and there is no reason that, given health and strength,

the blind man should not be very happy. He depends upon the love and friendship which surround him for much of his happiness—as we all do. And if those who love him cannot always make him forget his blindness, let them strive as far as possible to make him *laugh* at the handicap which his loss entails. There is nothing like laughter to bring abnormal circumstances back to the normal. Laughter brings with it that spirit of comradeship which is all the blinded man needs to give him zest and interest in his own life. So far as he is able to lead the normal life of an ordinary man, so far will he, himself, be normal too. Given cheerful, healthy conditions—beyond the fact that all blind men are apt to be suspicious and somewhat jealous—there need be no fear that his misfortune will prove too great for him to bear. And even this suspicion and jealousy, so characteristic of blind men, are, after all, but the suspicion and jealousy of a man who fears that he is being forced to live in a world apart from other men.

And there is indeed no necessity that he should do so. Blindness seems to have given them the genius to comprehend the essentials of human happiness which is given to few sighted people to perceive.

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